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Do You Have to Gain Weight If You Quit Smoking?

A smoke-free diet with exercise can be your prescription for a long, healthy life.

There's evidence that some people who quit smoking, especially women, tend to gain weight. But weight gain is certainly not inevitable. Not everyone gains weight after quitting, and a lack of cigarettes doesn't have to mean an increase in calories.

Remember, continued smoking is a lot more dangerous than the added pounds quitting might bring. If you have the will to quit the addiction to nicotine, you certainly have the will to stick to a diet.

The Connection Between Smoking and Eating

When you quit smoking, your body goes through tremendous changes. These changes will inevitably include heightened senses of smell and taste. This might naturally lead to an increase in the appreciation of food and a tendency to eat more. Fattening foods may partly suppress your continuing craving for nicotine. Or you may feel that you deserve high-fat treats as compensation for giving up smoking.

Even if you do gain some weight after quitting smoking, if you follow these tips, especially exercising, you'll probably lose those pounds within a few months without smoking again.

TIPS FOR THE TRANSITION

Gaining weight after quitting smoking is less likely if you plan ahead. Here are some tips to help you make the transition:



- ✓ Drink more fluids, avoiding caffeine and alcohol; six to eight glasses of water a day is recommended.
- ✓ Eat lots of high-fiber foods, such as fresh vegetables, fruits, grains, popcorn (without butter and salt), rice cakes and cereal with nonfat milk. They're low in calories and keep your mouth busy.
- ✓ Leave the table after a meal, but before dessert, especially if that's when you used to light up.
- ✓ Chew a toothpick, a cinnamon stick or sugar-free gum as a nonfattening cigarette substitute.
- ✓ Brush your teeth frequently.
- ✓ Find alternative ways to keep your hands busy. Try craft projects, playing games or cards, or holding a small toy in your hand.
- ✓ Vigorous exercise can help curb both nicotine and food cravings. Go for something you really enjoy, be it walking, swimming, bike riding, jogging, tennis or aerobic dance. Exercise also helps relieve stress and tension.
- ✓ Use relaxation, stress reduction and meditation techniques to rid yourself of the stress you may have tried to mask, first with smoking and then with eating. This may help you get to the source of both problems.
- ✓ Keep a food diary to help you keep track of your consumption.